

Appendix

For

Proposed Grant Marsh Acquisition

March 3, 2017

Public Comment Summary -----	1
Public Comments (Written) in Full -----	3
Public Comments (Oral) from Public Meeting-----	30
FWP News Release February 2, 2017 -----	36
Billings Gazette January 29, 2017-----	38
Billings Gazette February 6, 2017 -----	39
Big Horn County News February 9, 2017 -----	40
Big Horn County News February 23, 2017-----	41

Grant Marsh PUBLIC COMMENT Summary

PUBLIC COMMENTS IN FULL

In the Decision Notice (DATE XXX), we have summarized public comments into various issues to which FWP has responded. Here we have included all written public comments received.

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, February 23, 2017 12:44 PM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: Public Comment: Grant Marsh WMA Environmental Assessment

I lived in Hardin from 1975 to 1999 then 6miles north of Hardin from 1999 until 2013 when illness forced a move. I have enjoyed the Grant Marsh access immensely. My sons ad I have hunted waterfowl, upland, fished and launched boats at the access. During that time a public access along the Big Horn has become increasingly important as more and more private parcels are either leased or otherwise closed to hunting or fishing access. The addition of acreage to the access will greatly enhance the potential for the area. I would agree the road is not always the best but we do not need a major highway to enjoy the area. I also find that the brush provides excellent habitat for the birds and deer especially in winter. Add this so future generations will have access to this beautiful area.

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, February 23, 2017 12:18 PM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: Public Comment: Grant Marsh WMA Environmental Assessment

I'm in support of the proposed acquisition. Public access, wildlife diversity, and riparian land would all be enhanced with the purchase. I also support walk in use, with limited vehicle access.

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, February 23, 2017 10:42 AM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: Public Comment: Grant Marsh WMA Environmental Assessment

I am a forty-five year resident of Big Horn county. I often hear people my age say they don't hunt anymore because they have no place to go. Mostly this is a cop out. For people like myself who want to be out, these WMA's are tremendous opportunities. I and my family hunted this 425 acre property a few times in the 90's. I know from experience this is the premier waterfowl, and catfish hole in the the Big Horn valley. The fact that it is a walk-in-only will help all the hunting opportunities. The Hardin paper put a negative spin on the meeting here by sensationalizing the nay sayers comments. My count was seven in favor three against and one of those changed his mind at the end. It is almost a given the person next to public land will object. [REDACTED] came up with everything he could think of to kill a proposed public project. Many of the opposed comments concerned road maintenance. I never thought it was up to FWP to provide all weather access to these sites. Please remember two thirds of Big Horn county is Reservation with limited hunting opportunities. I am in favor of this Grant Marsh WMA expansion project, and sincerely hope it is approved. Thanks

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, February 22, 2017 9:41 AM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: Big Horn River Property. 425 acres

Dear Ms. O'Reilly,
I am writing as public comment for the purchase of this land by FWP from [REDACTED].
Our family, the James', lived there for over 30 years. My parents, [REDACTED], were stewards of the land, raising cattle and alfalfa.
We were proud of our ranch and we are pleased to know that FWP will preserve it for others to enjoy. We hope that the house and outbuildings will be preserved. We would also like to offer to be volunteer caregivers of the property if the opportunity comes about.
Thank you for taking my comments into consideration.

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, February 21, 2017 9:19 AM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: Grant Marsh WMA

Hi Megan!

Count me down for one vote FOR the FWP purchase of 425 Acres in the subject WMA for development and management. It is very important to me to protect acreage such as this for the benefit and enjoyment of future generations.

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, February 23, 2017 10:27 AM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: Grant Marsh extension

I write to advise you that the southwest corner of the [REDACTED] property, that FWP is considering purchasing, has a portion of it under water a significant portion of the irrigation season, which renders that portion of the property unfit for any use. The irrigation waste water from the property immediately south of the [REDACTED] property, adjacent to Hwy 47, flows onto the [REDACTED] property. The area where there are trees gets filled up with water. The property east of Hwy 47 (the barrow pit area) fills up, the culvert under the approach is filled, with all this water flowing north to where a culvert is located under the highway. There the water pools until the culvert is filled and then flows over onto the property west of the Hwy 47. The irrigation waste water that flows across the [REDACTED] property is not supposed to travel onto the property west of the Hwy 47 and it appears that [REDACTED] has not taken any steps to protect his property from his neighbors' flooding. This problem has already resulted in legal action. If, in the future, irrigation waste water flows across the [REDACTED] property and onto the property west of Hwy 47, additional legal action could result and it is possible FWP could become involved if it owned the property now owned by [REDACTED].

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, February 17, 2017 12:16 PM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: Grant Marsh WMA

Dear Megan,

I am sending this message to show my support of the proposal to enlarge the Grant Marsh WMA by the purchase of adjacent lands. Sports men and women, through the purchase of sporting goods (PR/DJ excise taxes), have contributed millions of dollars over the years to the management and enhancement of our fish and wildlife resources. Any effort to make more land available to the general public for hunting, fishing and other natural resource outdoor experiences has my support. I strongly disagree with the (new) state policy of (reducing or curtailing) the purchase of lands for management and recreational purposes by the state/FWP. This new policy is self serving by special interest groups such as timber companies/agriculture/mining companies so they can line their pockets with money at the expense of the general Montana public. Thank you.

Sincerely,
[REDACTED]
Shepherd, MT

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, February 14, 2017 9:29 AM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: Grant Marsh Addition

Good morning,
I am writing in support of the FWP purchasing land along the Bighorn River. This would be a great addition to Montana's public lands.
Thanks for all you do,
[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, February 14, 2017 7:59 AM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: Grant Marsh addition

Dear Ms O'Reilly,

As a Montanan I can't think of a better use for FWP funds than to be used to increase important habitat, fishing and other recreation. I fully support the purchase and addition in this much needed area.
Thank you for your work on this, I sure as heck hope the Land Board sees this as being as necessary as it truly is.

Best regards,

[REDACTED]
Bozeman, MT

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, February 13, 2017 9:13 AM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: Grant Marsh Addition

Megan O'Reilly-
I would like to go on record as strongly supporting the purchase of 425 acres of property bordering Grant Marsh WMA in Bighorn County. Over the past 30 years I have hunted pheasants, ducks and geese on Grant Marsh WMA and used the boat ramp to gain access to the Bighorn River. I think this would be a great addition to the current property by providing more public access for hunting, fishing, bird watching, hiking and general enjoyment of the outdoors on this portion of the Bighorn River.
Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

[REDACTED]
Billings, MT.

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Saturday, February 11, 2017 9:35 AM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: Public Comment: Grant Marsh WMA Environmental Assessment

I am 100% behind the purchase of the additional acreage to the Grant Marsh area. We need more land for the public to use for recreation of all kinds.

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, February 09, 2017 10:17 PM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: Public Comment: Grant Marsh WMA Environmental Assessment

I strongly support this purchase along the Bighorn River. Any time FWP can acquire public access along our important waterways, they should do it. It will continue to get harder and harder to find this kind of property. This purchase is especially important because beside providing excellent recreational access along one of Montana's premier rivers, it also protects a large block of intact riparian area. Please support and push for this purchase.

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, February 09, 2017 9:24 AM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: Grant Marsh

Megan

I am in favor of the land purchase to add to the Grant Marsh Wildlife Management Area. I find it more difficult to find recreation access as many family farm and ranches are being purchased by new folks that no longer allow public use. Also, riparian habitat is critical to wildlife management.

Thank you for your and MFWP's efforts in obtaining critical public lands.

[REDACTED]
Ryegate, MT

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, February 08, 2017 10:37 AM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: Grant Marsh

Please purchase this land for the good of the public. It's not often FWP can get their hands on this much land close to a large population like Billings.
Good luck, hope you can buy it.

[REDACTED]
Billings MT 59101

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, February 07, 2017 9:01 AM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: Public Comment: Grant Marsh WMA Environmental Assessment

Having hunted in the area on many occasions I'm very familiar with the land covered by this proposal. I fully support FWP purchasing this addition to Grant Marsh. It will be a great addition to this WMA and will add recreational opportunities for the public.

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, February 07, 2017 8:38 AM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: Public Comment: Grant Marsh WMA Environmental Assessment

This is a wonderful site that is close to Billings and other Eastern MT communities. I am very much in favor of the additional 425 Acres being added to the existing site.

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, February 07, 2017 7:46 AM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: Grant March

Very much in favor of this acquisition. Thank you. [REDACTED], Thompson Falls.

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, February 06, 2017 4:59 PM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: Public Comment: Grant Marsh WMA Environmental Assessment

I am in favor of adding the additional acres

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, February 06, 2017 3:58 PM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: Public Comment: Grant Marsh WMA Environmental Assessment

I am in favor of this acquisition.

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, February 06, 2017 3:36 PM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: Grant Marsh WMA proposed addition

I support the proposed addition to the Grant Marsh WMA. The addition will be a valuable addition for wildlife and provide much needed recreational opportunity for Montana residents and visitors.

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, February 02, 2017 8:53 PM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: Land purchase

I am in support of FWP purchasing 425 acres of land along the Bighorn River. Thank you.

[REDACTED]

Bozeman, MT. 59718

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, February 02, 2017 5:18 PM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: Big Horn Grant Marsh addition

I fully concur of the desirability to add the parcel suggested to the Grant Marsh Fishing Access site. I think it would enhance wildlife habitat and hunting and fishing opportunities in the area.

[REDACTED]

Billings MT 59102

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, February 01, 2017 9:36 PM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: Bighorn River Land Acquisition

Dear Ms. O'Reilly,

I would like to express my strong support for the proposed land purchase adjacent to the Grant Marsh WMA. I think this is an excellent use of sportsman's dollars and hope FWP can continue with this and other acquisition without further legislative interference.

Thanks for all you do.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]
Sheridan, MT

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, February 01, 2017 4:35 PM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: Public Comment: Grant Marsh WMA Environmental Assessment

Please note that we support the Alternative B proposal of the Grant Marsh WMA addition along the Bighorn River.

Wildlife Habitat should never be taken for granted. In addition, restoration of habitat has far reaching positive impacts.

This acquisition will be beneficial to wildlife and the people of not only Montana, but our nation. thank you for this opportunity to comment and thank you for your efforts in evaluating this proposal.

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, January 31, 2017 2:18 PM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: Land Acquisition along Big Horn River

Dear Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks:

I understand there is a desire to acquire some riparian habitat along the Big Horn River north of Hardin, MT. I say go for it. We need to protect as much riparian habitat as we can because it is fundamental to good wildlife habitat and it is key to preserving water quality and quantity.

The only issue I have is the statement in the Missoulain paper quoted below.

"Cattle may be grazed on the new property if acquired by FWP, but "only as a management tool to benefit the wildlife habitat."

When are you guys going to get off that bandwagon that wildlife needs domestic grazing in order to survive? How did these native species ever survive without the European white man introducing domestic grazing?

Anyway as I said above, the pluses outweigh the minuses. The wildlife, the waterfowl and the water quality will be better for it. They will be better with it than without it.

[REDACTED]
Bozeman, MT 59718

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, January 31, 2017 12:59 PM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: Land Acquisition

Dear Megan,

I support the purchase of the acreage on the Big Horn River by FWP in Montana. Thank you.

[REDACTED]
Bozeman MT
[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, January 31, 2017 11:24 AM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: 425 acres along Big Horn

Dear Megan Oreilly

I am sending this message in support of the proposed access area 7 miles North of Hardin. My family ranched that place for about 35 years. I have been worried that someone would turn it into a gravel mine or something else that would destroy the natural state of the place forever. It is one of few places of its kind on the Big Horn and deserves to be saved. I can speak for the rest of the family when I say that you have our full support.

Note: It would also be an appropriate and honorable thing to name/rename it to honor [REDACTED]. They were life-long residents of Big Horn County. It is common for roads and places in the area to be named after long time families.

If you have any comments or questions I will be more than happy to help.

Thank you,

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, January 31, 2017 9:29 AM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: letter of support for Bighorn River land acquisition

Dear Ms. O'Reilly,

I write to convey my strong support for FWP acquiring the 425 acres that border the south end of the 141-acre Grant Marsh Wildlife Management Area along the Bighorn River. This makes a lot of sense and would be a great acquisition for Montana's fish and wildlife as well as for Montana's hunters, anglers, wildlife enthusiasts, and outdoor recreationists. I love hunting waterfowl on the Bighorn, and I strongly support this acquisition.

Thank you.

[REDACTED]

Bozeman, MT 59715

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, January 31, 2017 9:17 AM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
[REDACTED]
Subject: FWP land acquisition along Bighorn River

Hi, As a former land owner in the Bighorn River valley close to the "3 mile" fishing access I wholeheartedly support FWP's proposed acquisition of land adjacent to the Grant Marsh FAS. Sounds like a win, win situation for everyone involved including nearby landowners. If private developers were to get hold of the land who knows what kind of a congestion producing scheme they might come up with. As I understand the proposal the only permanent residents of the land would be deer, ducks and pheasants. Neighbors we can all get along with. If I can help move this proposal forward in any way please let me know.
Thanks, [REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, January 30, 2017 10:21 PM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: Bighorn River Land Acquisition
Megan:

Please now I support FWP pursuing the purchase of 425 acres that borders the south end of the 141-acre Grant Marsh Wildlife Management Area, creating a larger block of habitat for species ranging from whitetail deer to pheasant and waterfowl. I also support the Montana Department of Transportation developing an adjacent 50-acre parcel as a wetland. Please put me on the mailing list for any correspondence related to this proposal.

Thank you for your good work here.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]
Bozeman, MT 59718

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, January 30, 2017 5:09 PM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: Public comment on purchase of land adjacent to Grant Marsh Wildlife Management Area

Dear Ms. O'Reilly,

This letter is in support of MT Fish Wildlife and Parks proposed purchase of 425 acres bordering the south end of the 141-acre Grant Marsh Wildlife Management Area. It isn't often there is a chance to buy such intact, high-quality habitat, especially adjacent to an already existing WMA. This is a very positive situation for wildlife and Montanans, and I hope it can be purchased. I am a bird watcher and bird hunter and I know the Big Horn River is an important area for breeding birds, as well as during migration. The expansion of hunting and fishing opportunities will be great also!

I strongly support this purchase.

Sincerely,
[REDACTED]
Livingston, MT 59047
[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, January 30, 2017 12:47 PM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: Grant Marsh WMA additional land acquisition

Hi Megan,

I lived in Hardin for 34 years and now live in Billings. I was on the FWP Commission years back - 1993-2001. I have been to the Grant Marsh WMA many times hunting, dog training and boat launching, and I still hunt and fish frequently in the Hardin area. I strongly support acquisition of the adjacent 425 acres as described in today's Billings Gazette. It will be an important addition to habitat protection and hunter opportunity along the lower Bighorn River. Also, I do encourage management grazing of the entire WMA. I hope you can make it happen!

Best regards,

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Billings, 59101

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, January 30, 2017 11:02 AM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: Big Horn River acquisition

Dear Megan

I fully support MDFWP purchasing 425 acres along the Bighorn River adjacent to the Grant Marsh WMA. I think acquisition of this riparian habitat will have huge benefits for wildlife, as well as the people of Montana. Riparian habitat is one of the rarest habitat types in the arid West and utilized by upwards of 80% of all wildlife at some time or other in their life cycles. It is also a great recreational resource in terms of access to the Big Horn River, and opportunities for hunting, etc.

Please know you have my full support.

[REDACTED]
Livingston Mont.

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, January 29, 2017 12:45 PM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: Purchase of land at Grant Marsh WMA

I have hunted Pheasants and Sharp-tail at Grant Marsh the last three years. 140 acres is small and this year was the least productive for Pheasants and Sharp-tail. I think that the habitat management is very good in this area for Upland Birds. The proposed expansion is excellent news. As a bird hunter, I would far prefer the development of WMA's over BMA because, in my experience, almost all BMA is of very poor bird habitat quality. The addition of 425 acres would help with the size and quality of habitat for birds which is so fragmented in Montana. I believe that when bird hunting areas are so small it does impact bird numbers related to pressure from predators human and otherwise. I would encourage you and your colleagues to place your resources into WMA's and Open Fields and not BMA when it comes to expansion and size development. I want to be notified of public meetings on the proposed Grant Marsh land purchase and I am signed up thru your website to get those that relate to Upland Bird Hunting.

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, January 29, 2017 7:38 AM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: Public Comment: Grant Marsh WMA Environmental Assessment

Dear Fish Wildlife & Parks Commission & Montana State Lands Board,
I support the fee purchase of the 425 acres next to the Grant Marsh Wildlife Management Area. A opportunity to purchase land next to a existing WMA doesn't come around everyday, so please proceed with this purchase. As a landowner next to a existing FAS (Emigrant West) I see the benefit of having land open to the public for hunting and fishing. I've never had a bad experience with anyone using the FAS in the 26 years I've owned the property next to it.
Another benefit to this purchase is, the FWP usually leases out the farming and it gives someone that can't afford to purchase land the opportunity to farm it.
If you have any questions about my comments, please feel free to give me a call or email.

Thank you

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Emigrant, MT 59027
[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, January 29, 2017 5:02 PM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: Bighorn river land acquisition

I wholeheartedly support this acquisition! Land on which the public has access to hunt is an extraordinarily rare commodity. I believe the legislature was short sighted in limiting these purchases. Please proceed with haste to acquire this priceless parcel for future Montanans. I do not understand why landowners would oppose this; it's like the boy who spit in the peaches: he could not hold anymore but made sure no one else wanted them either.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Butte, MT 59701
[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, February 23, 2017 2:38 PM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: Public Comment: Grant Marsh WMA Environmental Assessment

I am in support of MT FWP purchasing the 425 acres to expand Grant Marsh. This is an opportunity that can't be passed up. I, as a sportswomen, have hunted this land so know it's value. I think it is so fortunate that the owner wants to sell to MT FWP instead of pursuing a higher price from some wealthy individual or corporation.

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, February 23, 2017 9:07 PM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: Public comments Grant Marsh

As a Montana sportsman and citizen who values wildlife and public access I strongly support the purchase of the additional land encompassing Grants Marsh FAC. This purchase is a perfect opportunity to enlarge and enhance a Fishing Access Site to provide great public benefits. Adding this acreage allows it to be managed for the benefit of area wildlife, the citizens and for the positive economic impact of the nearby businesses. Our FWP administrators and others who worked to facilitate this purchase deserve our sincere appreciation, Thank You.

[REDACTED]
Boyd, MT 59013

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, February 24, 2017 10:06 AM
To: O'Reilly, Megan
Subject: Public Comment: Grant Marsh WMA Environmental Assessment

I'm excited about this excellent opportunity to advance riparian areas because this will offer me an avid outdoor enthusiast another place observe Birds in their 'unbroken' natural habitat. I hunt with a camera and this is a prime area on the Big Horn R. that i'll take my camera to.

What is quite astonishing is this acquisition is a WIN WIN for everyone. There is no impact on our pocket books, the land or it's access; There's no risk to the community,

It's the duty of good stewardship to make this Grant Marsh WMA happen.

Thank you Megan, for all your hard work and dedication to broadening the outdoor horizons for me, my family of birders and the public in general.

From [REDACTED] 2/24/2016 ~ 4:30 pm

The below comment was written out by wildlife biologist Megan O'Reilly while on the phone with the commenter.

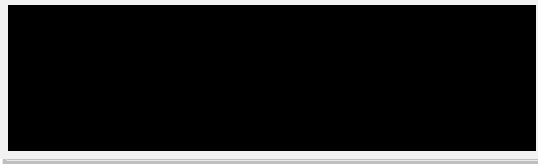
I don't think it's a good situation to get into. It gets flooded every 3 years. It's called Grant Marsh for a reason. I do believe you'll be throwing good money after bad. I think all you are going to do is create a party place.

Written Comment

Name: _____

Address: _____

E-mail: _____



I think the money could be used
in many different areas, more game wardens
etc.

Megan O'Reilly
TO: FISH-WILDLIFE + PARKS
Billings MT
Lake Elmo Rd 59105

(Comments)

2-17-17

I ATTENDED A MEETING IN HARDEN MT 59034 ABOUT, PROPOSED PURCHASE OF adjoining (425) acres, AT GRANT MARSH WILDLIFE AREA ALONG BIG HORN RIVER. THIS WAS A PUBLIC MEETING TO HEAR COMMENTS ON PURCHASE.

A CONCERN WAS BROUGHT UP ABOUT OLIVE TREES, THAT THERE ARE TOO MANY ON SAID PROPOSED LAND PURCHASE. MY COMMENT ON OLIVE TREES, IS, FROM EXPERIENCE HUNTING + FISHING THE BIG HORN RIVER IS WE NEED OLIVE TREES. OLIVE TREES HELP ~~THE~~ THE BANKS OF THIS SAID, AREA FROM ~~ERODING~~ eroding, LOSS OF SOIL. OLIVE TREES HELP WILDLIFE FOR PROTECTION AND AS A FOOD SOURCE. I USUALLY KNOW - TURKEYS, PHEASANTS, WOOD DUCKS, AND DEER EAT THE OLIVE FRUITS FROM OLIVE TREES. ALSO, WHEN FLOATING THE BIG HORN RIVER, DUCKS + GESE HANG OUT IN AREAS WHERE OLIVE TREES HANG OVER THE BANKS OF THE BIG HORN RIVER, WHICH, THEN TREE BRANCHES OF THE OLIVE TREES ARE IN THE WATER EDGE CREATING A LITTLE POOL, SLOWER CURRENT, SITUATION ALONG THE BANKS. THE DUCKS + GESE SEEK THESE AREAS BECAUSE THEY DON'T HAVE TO USE AS MUCH ENERGY TO SWIM IN THE SLOWER CURRENT AND FOR SAFETY, AND FOOD. SO, I BELIEVE OLIVE TREES ON THIS PROPOSED LAND PURCHASE ARE VERY IMPORTANT FOR HABITAT, AND FOOD SOURCE.

A CONCERN WAS MENTIONED ABOUT HIGH POWER RIFLES FROM (MAYBE) A LAND OWNER NEAR THE LAND PURCHASE AREA, HIS WORRY WAS DURING DEER SEASON - USE OF RIFLES. SOLUTION: SET UP SAFETY ZONES IN AREAS ON THIS LAND WHERE A CONCERN MIGHT BE. IF THERE IS A (REAL) NEED, TO HAVE THE PROPOSED LAND PURCHASE, A SHOTGUN WITH SLUG ONLY WOULD BE FOR DEER HUNTING. A SHOTGUN SLUG OR BUCKSHOT DOES NOT HAVE THE RANGE OF A RIFLE. (SEE ATTACHED PAGE TWO) PLEASE

(2)

TO MT FISH-WILDLIFE, PARKS

2-17-17

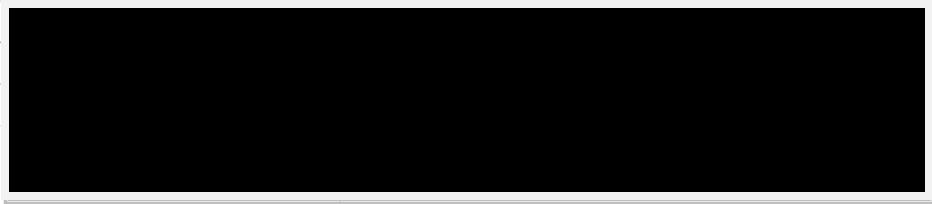
I LIKED TO ADD IN MY COMMENTS
ALSO, THERE^{ARE} MANY OTHER FISHING ACCESS SITES
THAT ALLOW HUNTING BIG GAME WITH RIFLE DURING
ESTABLISHED HUNTING SEASONS. FOR AN EXAMPLE,

- ① HORSETHIEF STATION; ALONG ROCK CREEK 5.3 MILES
NORTH OF REG LODGE, MT 59068. (OPEN WITH NO WEAPONS
RESTRICTIONS.)
- ② BEAVER LODGE; ALONG ROCK CREEK - RED LODGE, MT AREA,
OPEN DURING ESTABLISHED HUNTING SEASONS WITH (NO
WEAPONS RESTRICTIONS)
- ③ WATER BIRCH; RED LODGE, MT ALONG ROCK CREEK
(NO WEAPONS RESTRICTION) DURING ESTABLISHED
HUNTING SEASONS
- ④ CLIFF SWALLOW - ALONG STILLWATER RIVER - ~~ABS~~ COLUMBUS MT
AREA: NO WEAPONS RESTRICTIONS, ESTABLISHED HUNTING
SEASONS
- ⑤ CASTLE ROCK - ALONG STILLWATER RIVER - ABSAROKEE MT
AREA - NO WEAPONS RESTRICTIONS.

(6-8) GENERAL LUSTER AND MANUEL LISA + (GRANT MARSH)
THESE THREE (FAS) ALL ALONG THE BIG HORN
RIVER WITH NO WEAPONS RESTRICTIONS.
(PLEASE) NOTE GRANT MARSH WHICH WE ARE
CONCERNED ABOUT ALREADY HAS A NO WEAPONS
RESTRICTION RULE IN EFFECT.

THIS INFO IS IN THE MONTANA'S FISHING
ACCESS SITE FIELD GUIDE PUT-OUT BY THE ~~MT~~
MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE + PARKS DEPT.

FILE FILE TO CONTACT ME ~~AT~~ AT



February 13, 2017

Megan O'Reilly
Wildlife Biologist
2300 Lake Elmo Drive
Billings, Mt. 59105

Ms O'Reilly,

I am writing to express comments about the proposed purchase of 425 acres that borders the south end of the 141 acre Grant Marsh Wildlife Management Area. This sounds like a good deal because it will create a larger block of wildlife habitat.

I have a **very strong opinion about our public lands and the wildlife on them.!!!**

Public lands and the wildlife on them belong to all of us, not just to hunters or anglers. FWP must NOT allow commercial trapping on this land, nothing should ever be allowed that exploits our wildlife For Profit.

I love to hike and am a bird watcher, was very active with Yellowstone Valley Audubon when living in Billings and this sounds like great habitat for birds, also. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,



2-2-17

To Megan O'Reilly;
Wildlife Biologist
FWP-2300 Lake Elmo Dr
Billings MT 59105

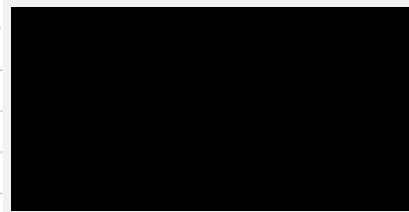
TO THE PURCHASE of Land ADJOINING Grant
MARSH of around 425 acres along THE Big Horn
River 7 miles NORTH of Hardin, MT 59034,
I am in complete ~~support~~ SUPPORT
of this project by FISH, WILDLIFE, AND PARKS
Billings Montana 59105.

I MYSELF ARE A HUNTER FISHERMAN,
and WILDLIFE SUPPORTER. I HAVE A
JET BOAT AND FLOAT BOAT AND HAVE FOUR HUNTING
DOGS. I'VE HUNTED AND FISH in Montana ~~for~~
FOR atleast 37 years, some on the Big Horn
River and HAVE USED Grant Marsh Wildlife
Management Area. THIS PURCHASE WOULD, in
my OPINION ENHANCE MY, AND MY FRIENDS
OUTDOOR EXPERIENCE. MY BELIEF IS FWP SHOULD
~~continue~~ continue land purchases LIKE THIS,
EVEN IF IT MEANS RAISING license FEES.

I'll TRY TO ATTEND THE PUBLIC MEETING ON THIS
land purchase TO ~~show~~ SHOW MY SUPPORT.

Sincerely

P.S. NOT THE
BEST SPELLER
BUT YOU GET
THE IDEA.



Jan. 31, 2017



Megan O'Reilly, Wildlife Biologist

2300 Lake Elmo Dr, Billings, MT 59105

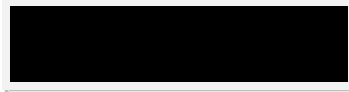
Dear Ms O'Reilly:

I am writing in support of the Montana FWP's proposed purchase of 425 acres adjoining the Grant Marsh WMA on the Bighorn River. It is well known that eastern Montana's riparian areas constitute only about 1 percent of the total acreage yet support a much larger amount of the wildlife, providing cover, food sources and water. This parcel would protect habitat for waterfowl, upland gamebirds, big game and non-game species in a region where such protection is scarce.

As a hunter, fisherman and bird watcher I believe this purchase is a very good use of funds expressly earmarked for habitat protection.

Thank you for the opportunity to make my opinion known on this issue.

Sincerely,



Written Comment

Name: _____
Address: _____
E-mail: _____

I ATTENDED THE MEETING IN HARDIN the other night AND I support the purchase FOR the Grant MARSH ADDITION. I ASKED THE QUESTION OF WHETHER THE FWP WOULD PAY THE ASSESSMENTS FOR THE IRRIGATION DISTRICT AND THE DRAINAGE DISTRICT. I WAS TOLD BY ONE OF THE MEN IN THE BACK THAT FWP WOULD PAY. ON PAGE 17, SECTION 106 IT SAYS THAT THE TWO LEWIN WATER USERS ANNUAL ASSESSMENT IS INCLUDED IN THE TAX BILL. THIS IS INCORRECT. FIRST THE COMPANY THAT SUPPLIES WATER TO THIS GROUND IS THE LOW LINE DITCH COMPANY. THE LOW LINE BILLS ITS ANNUAL ASSESSMENT DIRECTLY TO ITS STOCKHOLDERS. THE STOCKHOLDERS PAY THE LOW LINE COMPANY DIRECTLY. THIS ASSESSMENT IS NOT ON THE TAX BILL. I THOUGHT THIS NEEDED TO BE PRINTED OUT TO FWP.

THE VALLEY CENTER DRAINAGE DISTRICT IS A DISTRICT THAT PROVIDES DRAINAGE DITCHES TO CARRY WATER FROM FIELDS THAT HAVE BEEN IRRIGATED BACK TO THE RIVER. THEIR ASSESSMENT IS INCLUDED IN THE TAX BILL. SO IF YOU PAY YOUR TAX BILL THIS ASSESSMENT WOULD BE PAID.

MY WHOLE POINT IS ABOUT BEING A GOOD NEIGHBOR. IF FWP DOES NOT PAY ITS TAX BILL OR PAY ITS ANNUAL IRRIGATION ASSESSMENT OR MAKES LIFE DIFFICULT FOR THE DRAINAGE DISTRICT WHEN IT TRIES TO CLEAN ONE OF THEIR DRAINAGE DITCHES THEN THE OTHER LANDOWNERS HAVE TO PICK UP THE SLACK. I HOPE THAT DOES NOT HAPPEN. I HOPE YOU PURCHASE THE PROPERTY AND YOU ARE A GOOD NEIGHBOR.

Actress Sarah Bernhardt achieved worldwide acclaim for her intense dramatic stage performances. She is shown here in Paris, France, in her role in La Tosca.

Dear Megan O'Reilly:

I'm writing to express my wholehearted support for the proposal to add 425 acres to the Grant Marsh WMA near Hardin. The management goals for that property are all very much worthwhile, so FWP should go for it, and strike while the iron is hot! Nuff said.

Adios,

GILDED G

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Megan O'Reilly
Montana FWP
2300 Lake Elmo Dr.
Billings, MT 59105

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
AND CONSERVATION

Trust Land Management Division



STEVE BULLOCK, GOVERNOR

1539 ELEVENTH AVENUE

DIRECTOR'S OFFICE (406) 444-2074
TELEFAX NUMBER (406) 444-2684

PO BOX 201601
HELENA, MONTANA 59620-1601

February 24, 2017

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
2300 Lake Elmo Drive
Billings MT 59105
Attn: Megan O'Reilly

Re: Grant Marsh WMA Property Acquisition – Request for Comments

Dear Ms. O'Reilly,

The Trust Land Management Division of the Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation (DNRC) has reviewed FWP's January 24, 2017 draft Environmental Assessment and offers the following comments.

The State of Montana owns the beds of navigable rivers, islands formed up out of the bed of the river after statehood, and their accretions. The DNRC manages these riverbeds and islands on behalf of the public land and common schools trust beneficiaries. Based on historical evidence and case law, the Bighorn River is commercially navigable from the Wyoming state line to its confluence with the Yellowstone River, and therefore claimed and managed as such by DNRC.

In addition to the active channel, it is possible that common schools state trust island landforms may exist or may be formed in the future in the Grant Marsh WMA property acquisition stretch of the Bighorn River. However, state trust ownership of the riverbed and island landforms should not conflict with the FWP's ownership and management of the WMA. State statute establishes these landforms as Island Parks, and recognizes the recreational value of Montana's river and lake islands:

- 77-1-405. Island parks established -- development limited.** (1) In order to retain the integrity of the recreational experience associated with Montana's river and lake islands, development of undisputed state-owned or state-leased island property, which is hereby designated as island parks, including islands designated as state property under 70-18-203, lying within and surrounded by a navigable river, stream, or lake is limited, after April 30, 1997, to:
- (a) the installation of minimal signage indicating that the island is a designated island park in which development has been limited and encouraging the public to help in maintaining the island park's primitive character by picking out trash;
 - (b) necessary latrine facilities if approved by the state parks and recreation board established in 2-15-3406;
 - (c) footings or pilings necessary for the construction of a bridge;
 - (d) oil and gas leasing; and
 - (e) development of a boat dock at Wild Horse Island state park.

(2) Improvements made to and agricultural operations on state-owned or state-leased island property prior to April 30, 1997, may be maintained or continued, but further development is limited as provided in this section.

(3) Notwithstanding the provisions of 77-1-203 regarding multiple-use management, the legislature finds that the highest and best use of island property administered as school trust land, except islands designated as natural areas pursuant to Title 76, chapter 12, is for recreation and grazing and that those islands should be left in as primitive a state as possible to protect from the loss of potential future revenue that could result from the failure to leave the islands in an undeveloped condition.

(4) For purposes of this section, state ownership or state lease of island property is disputed if the dispute arises before, on, or after April 30, 1997.

History: En. Sec. 1, Ch. 449, L. 1997; amd. Sec. 22, Ch. 235, L. 2013; amd. Sec. 1, Ch. 5, L. 2015.

It is important to note that 77-1-405(1)(d) only allows the issuance of oil & gas leases. No activity or infrastructure of any kind is allowed on the island landforms.

If you have any questions regarding the trust lands and riverbeds owned by the state, please contact Teresa Kinley at (406) 444-2845 or tkinley@mt.gov.

Sincerely,



Shawn Thomas, Administrator
Trust Land Management Division

Copy: Matt Wolcott, SLO Area Manager

February 16, 2017

Megan O'Reilly, Biologist
Region 5
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
2300 Lake Elmo Drive
Billings, MT 59105

Comments regards to the purchase of property for the Grant Marsh Wildlife Management Area

Dear Biologist O'Reilly,

I attended public hearing Monday, February 13, 2017, at the Region 5 Headquarters and commented that I was for the purchase of the property in question.

I believe that this property will provide many recreational opportunities for the sportspersons living in our area, especially eastern Yellowstone County, the residents of Bighorn County near Hardin and even as far as county residents in Treasure and Rosebud counties.

Property such as this doesn't come up very often in our area. It will provide not only hunting and fishing opportunities, but will provide other outdoor activities such as bird watching, hiking, and just provide a place for folks to enjoy Montana's great outdoors.

It is nice to see a property as this come up for sale and for the FWP to have a chance to purchase it. In my experience with land purchases with the FWP, most land purchased by the FWP are in western Montana and it is nice to see something like this come up in our area.

Again, for the record, my wife and I are in favor for the FWP to purchase the property.



Grant Marsh WMA Proposed Addition Environmental Assessment Public Hearing
Billings, MT
February 13, 2017

Recorded Public Comments:

[REDACTED] I'd speak in favor of Alternative B to acquire the property. I think the property is outstanding with three potentials – increase upland bird hunting, increase waterfowl hunting and bird watching.

[REDACTED] I hunt and fish a lot down in that area and use Grant Marsh a lot and I think that I am very much in favor of Plan B. I think it's an outstanding piece of property. And I think it is a huge benefit to the Hardin community, and everybody, all the fisherman, sportsmen, in the whole area that use it, so I would hope you guys could do everything that you could to get this purchased. Thank you.

[REDACTED]: Megan, Bob, Ray and Barb, thanks for hard work on this. Nice addition. I shoot at pheasants out there, I don't hit very many, but I do shoot at them. I'm representing the Hammond family. We support this, but the president of the Laurel Rod and Gun Club, 400 family members couldn't be here tonight. Laurel Rod and Gun supports the proposal. Additionally, the Montana Sportsman Alliance, which has representatives all over the state, and with the click of a button amazingly has 1,400 e-mail contacts throughout the whole state, so Montana also supporting Montana Sportsman Alliance proposal. Thank you.

[REDACTED]: I sit on the board of directors for the Pheasants Forever locally Yellowstone Chapter. We are all in support of this and excited to out there and get some habitat improvement projects done out there. Get our guys working on building some more habitat for birds, deer, ducks, whatever we can do to help out. Thank you.

[REDACTED]: I am representing the Public Land and Water Access Association. I think we have 8,900 members now and I'm the president so I can speak for them. And we are in favor of this acquisition. One question, I'm wondering why a purchase like this doesn't include some money from the Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust? I'm also a member of an advisory committee on that and there's, in April of this year, we'll allocate about a million dollars from that trust. That came about as a result of the sale of cabin sites on Canyon Ferry Reservoir, and that money went into a trust. This is according to Senator Baucus; he proposed the legislation. And that trust now is 25 million dollars I think. We can take interest from that every year. Half of it has to the area from Holter Dam to the Three Forks and that area, but the other half which is over a half a million dollars can go statewide. And the advantage is not just the fact the Fish and Wildlife, Fish and Game is purchasing this, you got a buy in from a whole bunch of other people and a foundation that makes it harder to resist if someone is inclined to do that. So, we are in favor of it, but in the future if you have a proposed acquisition like this, make sure you contact this trust and see if you can get at least some of the money from them, because you then have another party representing proposing to buy this. We're going to have a half a million dollars to allocate out the various projects, and we have allocated money to the Fish, Wildlife and Parks before so I know this is how it goes.

[REDACTED]: Live in Lockwood here. I spend a lot of time down at Grant Marsh also, and I'm in favor of the purchase. I have a little comment more for the Land Board, I think 1.4 million is a really good price for this much property. 1.5, it's a steal; it's an excellent deal. And this land is going to do nothing but go up in value, so 20 years from now we come in and do an appraisal; it's going to be a really good investment for us. I hope the Land Board gets on board with it.

[REDACTED]: I support purchasing this land down there. I think it's a great thing for eastern Yellowstone County and Bighorn County and folks who live in the east area here to recreate down there. As you know a lot of this land that is always bought is in the western part of the state, very little is down here. I think this is a good opportunity to provide recreation for a lot of Billings people, Hardin people, Forsyth, so on. Thank you.

[REDACTED]: I think the Bighorn River is one of the best resources this state has, and I'm all in favor of purchase for this. I can say a whole lot more, but instead I will just say ditto like everybody else. So, I'm just really excited about this being so close to Billings. Now for the locals down there, it will bring economy in, and also for people in Billings and the surrounding area, be able to go down there and actually enjoy themselves. It's not going to have roads in, I think it's a huge plus, so the walk-in portion of that, I'm all for it.

[REDACTED]: I'm going to put a different spin on it. I think it's important to protect a part of the Bighorn. It is a beautiful river. Gotten to fish on it myself this year a lot more, and I'm learning it. But I think from the different perspective, I think it's great to set aside a part of it to protect it from landowner misuse, agricultural or whatever. It protects it from trash, so it more of conservation side of protecting a beautiful river that we have in Montana. And I think that's the important, you know, point of it also as well, because I deal with a lot of people with pesticides and aren't my job and stuff like that I hear about and fertilizer and seed and stuff. So, again I think it's for a great conservation value, more ecological and environmental aspect to it too.

[REDACTED]: One last comment that's related to this kind of a little bit downstream is I think it would be really nice; a number of years ago, a bunch of us got together and tried to do access sites every eight miles up and down the Yellowstone River from here to North Dakota. We had some successes, but mostly failures. One of the things I'd like you guys to keep in mind is if we get this thing pulled off, this acquisition, you know are there going to be some opportunities to get between like General Custer and the Custer confluence an area or somewhere up above General Custer into the future. I think it would be a great piece of inventory if we could utilize the lower river below Bighorn as well because we have the diversion dam downstream. Thank you.

[REDACTED]: Yes, and I think we should warn the Land Board that if they decide to go against this, they will have half of Montana sportsmen breathing down their necks for a long time.

[REDACTED]: I support the purchase of the project.

[REDACTED]: I live in Hardin. I drove that north valley bus route every morning, evening, every day during the school year for years. I know there is way too many deer in that stretch. I hit them myself with company car, and bus, my own vehicle. We need that property to save insurance companies.

Grant Marsh WMA Environmental Assessment Public Hearing
Hardin, MT
February 16, 2017

Recorded Public Comments:

[REDACTED]: One of my concerns is and I have three of them, is accessibility; I was talking to your communications director here, and I have lived here most of my life. You know from the time you put in to begin with. As far as accessibility, were pathetic in my mind, comes, you know jumps out at you. Even in the good times, there's ruts in the road, there's one way traffic, you can't get in and out of these places. They're not maintained, they're not taken care of at all, and to me why are we spending this kind of money. I think it's a great idea, I really do, but I can't see us spending this kind of money on something when we can't take care of what we got now, so that's my complaint. I'm just asking why accessibility isn't a priority. That's what I am asking. Why aren't these roads taken care of so you can access these sites? I mean Grant Marsh; we were out there a while back. The only way to get in and out of there was with chains. I guarantee you, you've been down the road with someone with four-wheel drive and chains tearing it up, you don't want to take a regular vehicle down there. That's also at Koyama Pond, or whatever you call it down here too. Where's your responsibility start in regards to access?

[REDACTED]: You are gonna lose the access roads anyway by the end of this year, because that road is cutting in. Where that river is cutting in, it's within 15 feet of the road now. We've lost probably better than 30 or 40 feet of the river bank in the last year, and there was nothing done. There hasn't been anything done to prevent that erosion in that corner, so with this 425 acres, there's some more corners like that, and you are going to lose a lot of the river bank if you don't do something about erosion. There's no comment made about soil erosion or anything else in this. My question is what the hell are you going to do about the erosion and stuff that is going on, and what are you going to do when it takes that road out? Are you going to rebuild the road? Just five years ago, you spent a hell of a bunch of money rebuilding that road when the flood of 2011 went through there, and you didn't do anything about controlling the erosion, and now it's going to take that road out that you spent all the money on within this year. I'll guarantee you, if we get some high water, it'll take it out. Because that corner is you're losing 15 to 20 feet out of there. The road by the boat ramp. The fence you built in 2011 is already in the river. The thing about it is fellas, taking on 425 acres like that, you can't take on 425 acres and then walk away from it and think that everything is great. You haven't done shit for controlling the weeds down there on the 149 acres you got on the Grant Marsh right now. I live right in the corner where all this is taking place. I'm right next door to it, and I'm seeing a tremendous amount of weeds over there at the Montana Department of Transportation (DOT) where they made that big swamp over there, what they attempted to make a swamp; none of it is filled up yet luckily. There hasn't been anything done in there to control weeds. All that ground that they disturbed along where they put the fence line in, they never seeded or a damn thing. It's nothing but solid kochia all the way through there. I called the DOT quite a few times nothing has been done. I've sprayed weeds some, but I'm going to spray the DOT property to control weeds. And with the Grant Marsh it's the same way. There's weeds all over that. All you gotta do is drive through the gate and look and it's the biggest weed patch you've ever seen in your life. And nothings being done. So now you are going to take on 425 acres and you say you are going to maintain it like the Grant Marsh, it's gonna be the biggest damn mess there ever was, and I live right next door to it and try to fight weeds all the time on my property. The thing about it is I wrote a letter to comment to DOT when they were proposing that and I pointed out these problems. They assured me they were going to take care of it and it was going to be their highest priority. You call them up now and their guy says, it's alright; that's just the way we want it, and they aren't doing anything to take care of it. And the Grant Marsh isn't much better. You look over there and there is kochia, there's all kinds of weeds that are growing over there. The Russian olives are plum out of control. That area that you are talking about buying the 425 acres is

nothing Russian olives. Russian olives are noxious weed in Montana. The thing of it is if you don't take care of those problems, it's going to be a hell of a mess.

██████████: You guys aren't going to take care of that. It's going to be just as big a mess as what the Grant Marsh is and you have no business with it what so ever. Montana is broke anyway. They hollering about being broke and here we spend 1.572? I don't care the federal government is broke. We are 19 trillion dollars in debt. I don't care because it's all taxes and it comes out of our pocket. It's still taxes. The thing about it is everybody thinks well, it's already there it's earmarked for that. If you weren't wasting the money all the time, you wouldn't need to have these taxes in the first place fellas.

██████████: Add 425 acres to maintain the weed problem, and you are starting out in the dark there, because already this is a weed patch over there before you ever start out. It doesn't say anything about that in this.

██████████: I agree with him to a point and disagree with him to a point. First of all, the olive trees, wood ducks nest in them and eat the olives, and so do pheasants and all the wildlife. I don't look at an olive tree to be a weed. As far as maintaining that road, I agree with him a little bit. We were down there, me and Al were down there fishing a couple of weeks ago, and it was kind of touch in there, but give them a chance to go in there and maintain it. Some of the things they talk about can be fixed. I don't believe that what they are bringing up is reason enough to not go ahead with this. I don't live down there where he lives, and has probably the traffic, probably in reality doesn't like the traffic going in and out of there. Weeds, I mean, I've lived in Montana for 39 years, and I've been going down to the Bighorn for 39 years. As long as Grant Marsh has been open, I have been going down there. This has been an unusual winter, and I agree with you on that. The road is not that good going in, but get the transportation people a chance to fix it. I live 60 miles away. I'm kind of controverting what they say.

██████████: How do you deal with the Russian olives since you said they are not a native? Are they considered a native with the Fish, Wildlife and Parks? So, they could all be removed? Those are the worst things there are for the habitat. There's other trees and bushes, there's chokecherries, there's plums, there's cottonwoods, I could go on and on and on. If go down and look in history back in the 40's and 50's and before, the Russian olives always weren't here. And I'll guarantee the habitat, the animals, the deer, the whitetail, there wasn't the diseases, there wasn't any of the things going on, the pheasants were in abundance; sure, there's a lot more people, a lot more stress on all these animals, but their habitat was a heck of a lot better, I'll guarantee you that. But there's a lot more people, but what I'm saying is the Russian olive thing really needs to be taken care of. It's killing the cottonwoods. That should be a discussion if you are take on 400 and some acres, because that destroys property. As far as I'm concerned ask anybody that's trying, even people who have bird sanctuaries, and I know several that do in the county. And guess what they don't want that sort of thing around.

██████████: There's a daycare center and there's houses in any given direction within a half a mile of that 425 acres. High powered rifles down there with housing as close as it is around that whole property, even the present area is a big issue. Because if they're not watching which direction their shooting, they're gonna end up killing somebody down there. The thing about it is with all that brush and everything you got down there you can't see a lot of those houses.

██████████: I kind of agree with him on the high-powered rifle. But that could be changed to a rifle slug, a 12-gauge slug or 20-gauge slug which is not going to travel like a high-powered rifle. This gentleman here, I do agree with him with a high-powered rifle people are going to have to be careful, but that doesn't I don't think, like I said a shotgun with a slug would I think eliminate a lot of that worry, problem.

██████████: I got a bunch of aluminum pipe on a trailer right now that I can show you where a bullet hole from Grant Marsh went into that bundle of pipe.

██████████: And the Fish and Game should be called, law enforcement should be called and have it investigated. Someone's down there shooting at the houses, hey if I lived down there I wouldn't want anybody doing that. I totally agree with this fella.

██████████: That daycare is right there off the corner of that proposed area. You got a bunch of little kids playing there.

██████████: I support it. I'm mostly a bird hunter. I've got other places to go big game hunting and I wanna get my high-powered rifle out. But like this gentleman said there are houses down there and that to be a concern with the high-powered rifles, but like I said, I support it, the purchase.

██████████: I am very much in favor of the project. You know I have lived here for 40 years. I've hunted down there in the 90's. It's probably one of the best if not the very best locale in the whole north valley for waterfowl, and catfish where the river comes around and makes the bend against that bluff is a top-notch waterfowl and catfish hole. And the biggest deer that we have ever seen in the Bighorn valley we saw on that place when we were hunting deer there. I don't hunt private land. I hunt public land. And that is probably the best piece of public land I can imagine for the Fish and Game to acquire. And this fella here is grinding his own axe. He doesn't want to share what he has with anyone else. If I walked out to your place and said could I hunt? You'd say kiss my ass.

██████████: I against the project. One of the main reasons is I think you giving him way too much money. From what I know of the history of that buy that place was basically stolen. And I just think you are putting money there that could be used for another game warden down here. For more law enforcement for Grant Marsh or out here at Koyama's where all the drug dealers hang out.

██████████: I am in support of the land. It's prime property like ██████████ said. There's a lot of deer that get hit on the road there. I think I could help thin that down in a responsible way. I've been hunting since I was 12 and I've never shot anybody or any vehicles or houses yet, and I'm not planning to.

██████████: I'm for the purchase, I think it's a little high, but it's a pretty good idea.

██████████: I'm for it. It gives me another place to take the grandson to hunt a whitetail deer or take a pheasant or whatever we can find. The only other thing I would like to make a comment on is the southwest corner right against the highway where you can go in, there used to be a road you could go in there, I'd like to see if you buy this property, you go in there 50 yards or whatever and make a parking spot, gravel parking spot so you go in and out of there, and walk in from there. Because eventually you are going to have a lot of people parking along that highway, the mud, it's just a mess there, and if you could just spend a few dollars and put in a nice little gravel parking spot in there. I've hunted it, I've fished it for 30 to 40 years with ██████████ off and on, its great land. It's a great place, it's a great acquisition. Of course, I'm concerned with Fish, Wildlife & Parks to purchase. I understand this man's; I understand your problems and stuff that are going on. I wouldn't want you to; roads definitely need to be maintained in that area too. And the weeds too. Although some weeds are good bird habitat and stuff like that. I understand where they don't want to spray and kill everything, because then you lose your habitat.

██████████: I think some people are insulting, but I think the communications been here at the Fish, Wildlife and Parks here, got down to the very first statement I said. I think it's a great idea. I believe

that is what my comment was when I started. My concern is the roads, the weeds. If you can't take care of what you got, then you got no business purchasing a bunch more property. I think it's a great idea. As far as the price, if you look at what people are paying, they are paying insane prices on Bighorn property. But people need to get it controlled. Who's down here with Fish, Parks and Wildlife every day? Anybody? Is there a game warden down here every day in this area? He's in Hardin now? Okay, but there isn't anybody from Fish, Wildlife and someone needs to come down here and look at these parks, these places, Grant Marsh and come up and down the river. There in terrible shape. Limited access, this is what you say right here, this is one of the goals, management strategies is limited access. Heck you don't take care of the roads, they're not going to get in there, are they? And you know and I know its one way traffic most of the time and it's not very good. But I think it's a great idea. We need to take care of our wildlife.

██████████: I agree with him. I think that transportation or whoever is responsible for the road, give them a chance to maintain it. Maybe they didn't realize it's a problem. Like I said I was down there three weeks ago, and I had to put it in 4-wheel drive. But that's not something that cannot be fixed.

██████████: When you get two feet of snow you are going to have to expect, you know you got snow. You got mud, you got that traffic, it's not two way. I've never seen anyone complaining. I've hunted there for 20 years. I've never seen anyone complain because they have to pull over a little bit. Usually you stop and wave and you are all friendly. We don't need a two- lane paved highway going back there three quarters of a mile.

██████████: We had a wicked winter. I quit hunting in December because there was so much snow down along the Bighorn it was dangerous to go down there with a dog and shoot a duck and maybe have the dog go up on bank have to come up the bank to get it to retrieve it to hand. It was too dangerous for two months. Just a really unusual winter. Sometimes access is not all that great. If it's maintained by the DOT they know the problem, give them a chance to get in there and fix it.

██████████: I'm in favor of the project, but I also think this man here living there, he deserves that Fish and Game should put the pressure, not just him alone, on getting these weeds and that taken care of. You know what I mean, that's not fair. And he's living there. You know if I come out there, if I go out there to hunt, I hunt have a good time, I leave, where's he? He's right there all the time and he needs some help on that park. Like I said if the price is half way right I'm for it because we all know it that for the average guy, hunter, his circle is getting smaller all the time where he can hunt and so it makes sense. I also think like I said I know how I'd feel if I lived next door to it and have that problem and can't get any help.



Region 5 • 2300 Lake Elmo Dr. • Billings, MT 59105

Phone: 406-247-2940; Fax: 406-248-5026; Web: <http://fwp.mt.gov/regions/r5>

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Feb. 2, 2017

Contact: Robert C. Gibson

Office - (406) 247-2950

cell – (406) 599-0400

bgibson@mt.gov

FWP sets meetings on land acquisition

BILLINGS — Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks will hold two public hearings next week to answer questions and hear comments on a proposal to add 425 acres to the Grant Marsh Wildlife Management Area seven miles north of Hardin in Big Horn County.

The meetings are set for:

- 6 – 8 p.m. Monday, Feb. 13, at FWP's Region 5 headquarters, 2300 Lake Elmo Dr. in Billings Heights.
- 6-8 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 16 at the Big Horn County Extension Office, 317 North Custer Ave. in Hardin.

In January FWP issued an environmental assessment, which recommends purchase of the property with management goals of riparian wildlife habitat conservation, upland habitat enhancement primarily for white-tailed deer and pheasants, and providing substantial public hunting and recreational opportunities.

After public comments are considered, a final recommendation will go to the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission and State Land Board.

The environmental assessment is available online to read or download at <http://fwp.mt.gov> and follow links to News, Recent Public Notices, and Grant Marsh WMA Environmental Assessment.

In addition to the two hearings, people are encouraged to make comments in writing or online. The deadline for comments on the proposed purchase is 5 p.m. Friday, Feb. 24, 2017.

Written comments should go to:

Megan O'Reilly
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
2300 Lake Elmo Drive
Billings MT 59105
Emailed comments may go to O'Reilly at moreilly@mt.gov

A form for online submission of written comments is on the Grant Marsh WMA Environmental Assessment page of FWP's web site.

During the two public hearings, FWP will record spoken public comments and accept written comments to include in any decision.

FWP ensures its meetings are fully accessible to those with special needs. To request arrangements, call FWP at 444-3186.

-FWP-

FWP proposes purchase of 425 acres along Bighorn River

BRETT FRENCH french@billingsgazette.com

Jan 29, 2017

Riparian habitat along the coveted Bighorn River north of Hardin is being proposed for acquisition by the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

The 425 acres borders the south end of the 141-acre [Grant Marsh Wildlife Management Area](#), creating a larger block of habitat for species ranging from whitetail deer to pheasant and waterfowl. In addition, the Montana Department of Transportation is developing an adjacent 50-acre parcel as a wetland.

If approved, the pieced-together parcels would create the largest block of public land along the Bighorn River providing a boat launch, ponds, hunting opportunities and wildlife habitat. Details of the property are contained in a draft environmental assessment proposing the acquisition.

"I know our wildlife guys are pretty excited about that addition," said Bob Gibson, information and education manager for FWP's Region 5 in Billings.

Although the last Montana Legislature put the brakes on FWP's purchase of many new properties, the restriction only applies to funds collected after 2015, Gibson said. The funds for this purchase were acquired in 2013, skirting the new constraints. The deal will also have to be approved by the Fish and Wildlife Commission and the State Land Board, he added.

The \$1.57 million purchase price would be paid for with a combination of federal dollars earned from a [tax on the sale of firearms and ammunition](#) awarded to states for wildlife conservation, as well as from Montana's own fee assessed on hunting license sales through the [Habitat Montana](#) program. FWP would continue to make the land's annual tax payments.

Gibson said the Grant Marsh WMA, located about 7 miles north of Hardin off Highway 47, already receives regular use by warmwater anglers, waterfowl and pheasant hunters. Although the area is home to whitetail deer and the occasional elk, they usually abandon the property once they are pressured by hunters, he said.

Grant Marsh WMA was purchased in 1978. In 1989 about 77 acres were developed into a fishing access site that includes a boat launch. Although the Bighorn River farther upstream – just below Yellowtail Dam – is internationally acclaimed for its trout fishery, by the time the river reaches Grant Marsh it has transitioned to more warmwater species like smallmouth bass, sauger and the occasional northern pike.

The entire length of river is a green stripe through dry country, making it a wildlife mecca. In the fall and winter the river teems with geese and ducks, some migratory and others that take up permanent residence. "The majority of the Bighorn River Valley has been converted to intense irrigated cropland," the draft environmental assessment noted. "This addition would conserve one of the largest blocks of intact riparian habitat remaining in the Bighorn River Valley while broadening the conservation footprint of the existing Grant Marsh WMA. A productive complement of wildlife habitat including mature cottonwood galleries and native shrub thickets exist on the property. As a result, this parcel supports pheasants, mule deer, white-tailed deer, Merriam's turkeys, waterfowl and a variety of other nongame wildlife species. With nearly two miles of river frontage, the addition of this property would not only expand public hunting but also facilitate fishing and other public outdoor recreational activities."

Public hearings in Billings, Hardin on FWP land purchase

-FWP-

Feb 6, 2017

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks will hold two public hearings next week to answer questions and hear comments on a proposal to add 425 acres to the Grant Marsh Wildlife Management Area seven miles north of Hardin.

The meetings are set for: 6-8 p.m. Monday, Feb. 13, at FWP's Region 5 headquarters, 2300 Lake Elmo Dr. in Billings Heights; and 6-8 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 16, at the Big Horn County Extension Office, 317 N. Custer Ave. in Hardin.

In January, FWP issued an environmental assessment which recommends purchase of the property with management goals of riparian wildlife habitat conservation, upland habitat enhancement primarily for white-tailed deer and pheasants, and providing substantial public hunting and recreational opportunities.

After public comments are considered a final recommendation will go to the Fish and Wildlife Commission and State Land Board.

The environmental assessment is available online at <http://fwp.mt.gov>. Follow links to News, Recent Public Notices, and Grant Marsh WMA Environmental Assessment.

In addition to the two hearings, people are encouraged to make comments in writing or online. The deadline for comments on the proposed purchase is 5 p.m. on Feb. 24.

Written comments should go to: Megan O'Reilly, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 2300 Lake Elmo Drive, Billings MT 59105. Emailed comments may go to O'Reilly at moreilly@mt.gov.

FWP set to host public hearings for Grant Marsh land proposal

Thu, 02/09/2017 - 11:23am admin

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks will hold two public hearings next week to answer questions and hear comments on a proposal to add 425 acres to the Grant Marsh Wildlife Management Area seven miles north of Hardin in Big Horn County.

The meetings are set from 6-8 p.m. on Monday, Feb. 13 and Thursday, Feb. 16. The Feb. 13 meeting will be located at FWP's Region 5 headquarters, 2300 Lake Elmo Dr. in Billings Heights.

The Feb. 16 will be located at Big Horn County Extension Office, 317 North Custer Ave. in Hardin.

In January, FWP issued an environmental assessment, which recommends purchase of the property. This purchase is meant to help with riparian wildlife habitat conservation, upland habitat enhancement primarily for white-tailed deer and pheasants, and provide substantial public hunting and recreational opportunities.

After public comments are considered, a final recommendation will go to the Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission and State Land Board.

The environmental assessment is available online to read or download at <http://fwp.mt.gov>. Follow links to News, Recent Public Notices, and Grant Marsh WMA Environmental Assessment.

In addition to the two hearings, people are encouraged to make comments in writing or online. The deadline for comments on the proposed purchase is 5 p.m. on Friday, Feb. 24.

Written comments should go to Megan O'Reilly / Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks / 2300 Lake Elmo Drive / Billings, MT 59105. Emailed comments may go to O'Reilly at moreilly@mt.gov. A form for online submission of written comments is at the Grant Marsh WMA Environmental Assessment page of FWP's website.

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Grant Marsh proposal met with skepticism in Hardin meeting

Thu, 02/23/2017 - 5:00am admin

By Andrew Turck, Big Horn County News

Three days after an all-around positive open meeting in Billings, employees of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks encountered opposition in Hardin last Thursday evening as they presented their plans for Grant Marsh Wildlife Management Area. FWP intends to purchase 425 acres south of Grant Marsh, expanding it into an area located along the Bighorn River seven miles north of Hardin.

FWP's January draft environmental assessment states the purchase for Grant Marsh would both "enhance the functionality" and "broaden the conservation 'footprint'" of the area. Hunters and anglers often use the current 141-acre Grant Marsh location off Highway 47 as a place to shoot game and catch fish from nearly two miles of river frontage. The new addition would create the largest piece of public land surrounding the Bighorn River.

"The property came up for sale and was adjacent to our existing property," said Ray Mulé, FWP's wildlife program manager for Region 5. "It's a tremendous wildlife habitat and great opportunity for the public of Montana to be owners of that property."

Twenty-five percent of the \$1.57 million purchase would be provided by FWP and 75 percent by U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. According to FWP wildlife biologist Megan O'Reilly, the money has already been "earmarked" for the purchase.

Thomas Mefford, who lives "on the corner where this is taking place," objected to the plan to acquire extra acres, stating FWP has yet to take care of the land they already own. Kochia and Russian olives have overrun the area, he said, and a nearby road will likely be washed out soon due to erosion.

"You haven't done [anything to] control the weeds down there in the [141] acres you've got in the Grant Marsh right now," Mefford said. "You can't just take on 425 acres, walk away from it and think everything is great."

He's called the Montana Department of Transportation "quite a few times" in an attempt to get them to improve the Grant Marsh area, Mefford said, to no avail.

Though Hardin resident Mike Martinsen expressed support for the plan in theory, he said accessibility into the area is difficult and vehicles often require chains to enter Grant Marsh. Both he and Mefford were reluctant to use federal dollars if no improvements were made.

"As far as accessibility, the word 'pathetic,' in my mind, just jumps out at you," Martinsen said. "Even in the good times, there's ruts in the road, one-way traffic, you can't get out of these places. They're not maintained, they're not taken care of at all."

Darrell Mann of Billings voiced support for the purchase as someone who has "been going down to the Bighorn" for 30 years. The road has not been an easy journey this year due the "unusual winter," he continued, advocating that the Department of Transportation should be given the chance to fix it. Martinsen interjected, stating the area road had never been properly fixed.

Conversation often devolved into verbal sparring matches that evening, requiring FWP personnel to insist those present calm down or move to a different topic. While Mann and Mefford were involved in some verbal bouts, however, Mann did back the local area resident up on the need for hunter

safety. Mefford has a bullet hole in the aluminum pipe of his trailer, courtesy of someone using a high-powered rifle in the area. People “who aren’t watching which direction they’re shooting,” Mefford said, could end up killing someone. With the brush in the area, he continued, shooters can’t always see local houses. “I kind of agree with him on the high-powered rifle, but that can be changed to a rifle slug,” Mann said. “A 12-gauge slug or a 20-gauge slug is not going to travel like a [a bullet from] a high-powered rifle.” Mann advised Mefford to talk to FWP about the incident, adding that it should be investigated. “These are the comments that we want,” biologist O’Reilly said. Deadline for comments on the proposed purchase is 5 p.m. on Friday, Feb. 24. The Grant Marsh assessment may be found by visiting fwp.mt.gov, clicking on the “News” tab and following it to “Recent Public Notices.”

Emailed comments may be sent to O’Reilly at moreilly@mt.gov. A form for online submissions is available on the Grant Marsh assessment page of the FWP website.

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